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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IRAQ-POLAND: JONES-SMITH CONSULTATIONS WITH GOP

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Classified By: Acting DCM Lisa Piascik, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY. Ambassador Richard Jones Senior Adviser to the Secretary and Coordinator for Iraq Policy (S/I) led an interagency delegation to Warsaw July 28-29 to consult with senior GOP officials and encourage continued substantial Polish participation in the Iraq Coalition and the Multi-National Division Center-South (MND-CS). The current government, which will almost certainly relinquish power after September 25 parliamentary elections, refuses to take any affirmative decisions on Iraq while continuing to speak publicly of "withdrawal from Iraq." While the GOP agreed in principle to allow operational planning to go forward on all options, so that the next government would have full latitude to choose its course, there is very little chance that the current government will make any further commitment on MND-CS before the September elections. Nevertheless, Deputy CHOD Lt Gen Cieniuch said that the Polish General Staff is proceeding with planning for a robust follow-on "multi-national training force" that, he told Lt Gen Smith privately, would not differ substantially in either numbers or capabilities from the current MND-CS. Therefore, if the General Staff's plans are to reach fruition, senior military leaders will have to maintain continuous contact with their Polish counterparts, and we will have to engage immediately with the new political leadership following the September elections.

2. (C) The GOP also gave a readout of PM Belka's political consultations July 25-27 in Kuwait, Baghdad, Arbil and Istanbul (ref B). Septel reports on the delegation's working dinner with leaders of the two parties expected to form a coalition government after the September elections. This message was coordinated with USDAO Warsaw and cleared by Amb. Jones. END SUMMARY.

3. (C) Accompanied by Lt Gen Lance Smith, Deputy Commander USCENTCOM, Charge, and representatives of OSD and the Joint Staff, Amb. Jones met separately with PM Marek Belka and DefMin Jerzy Smajdzinski and attended a roundtable discussion at the MFA hosted by U/S Piotr Switalski. (Septel reports on the delegation's working dinner with leaders of the key opposition parties.) In all of their meetings, Amb. Jones and Lt Gen Smith stressed the same basic message:

- The political track is going well, with reasonable hope that the draft constitution will be completed by the August 15 deadline, to be followed by a constitutional referendum on October 15 and elections on December 15. That said, constitutional drafting deadline could be extended by up to six months, prolonging the entire process. Also, should the constitutional referendum fail, then an extension of up to 12 months would be required to schedule a new referendum.

- Iraqi Security Force (ISF) training is proceeding well, though not without some delays. In some sectors, including hopefully MND-CS, the ISF will be able to take over all routine security tasks by the middle of 2006. However, the 8th Iraq Division that is responsible for the sector is untested, so the transfer of responsibility may not go completely according to schedule.

- Given the uncertainties of both the political and military situation in Iraq, it is important that the GOP focus its public discussion of eventual Iraq drawdown and disengagement on the "conditions on the ground" rather than explicit timetables or dates certain.

- The USG is making preparations for a follow-on legal mechanism to UNSCR 1546, but this should not be discussed until after the constitutional referendum, so as not to prejudice or undermine the political process.

- Although the political process is proceeding apace, the U.S. expects there will be in fact an upswing in terrorist activity as important benchmarks such as the constitutional referendum and the December elections approach.

MFA ON IRAQ POLICY, BELKA TRIP READOUT

4. (C) At a working luncheon July 28 at the MFA hosted by U/S Switalski, Amb. Jones and Lt Gen Smith briefed on the situation in Iraq. Switalski was joined by MFA Director for

Middle East/Africa Krzysztof Plominski, Director for Americas Henryk Szlajfer and Director for Security Policy Robert Kupiecki, as well as by Lt Gen Mieczyslaw Cieniuch, Deputy Chief of the Polish General Staff. Switalski responded that the commitment to Iraq will remain a key priority to the GOP for both the current government and the future government that will take over after the September 25 parliamentary elections in Poland. PM Marek Belka's July 25-27 trip to Iraq (ref B), accompanied by FM Rotfeld, Szmajdziński and other senior officials (including Plominski and Kupiecki) had represented a shift in Poland's emphasis from "stabilization to normalization in Iraq." Belka's delegation had observed "centrifugal forces at work" in the constitutional drafting process, as the Kurds pursued their autonomy strategy and some Shiite elements sought the "Islamization" (i.e. inclusion of some or all elements of Shari'a) of the constitution. Jones said the U.S. was urging the Iraqis to opt for a "simple framework model" of the constitution that would leave as many contentious issues as possible out of the equation. He also opined that the Kurds and Shiites might be willing to set aside their respective demands as the price of full buy-in by Sunni leaders, which they seemed finally to have acknowledged as crucial to a successful political process. Switalski agreed that this would relieve some of the tension.

15. (C) ME/Africa Director Plominski then described the Belka delegation's visit. They had achieved no "concrete results" but they had accomplished the main goal of establishing a normal bilateral relationship. Belka had told Iraqi officials, including the PM and DefMin, that Poland was prepared to provide significant assistance but that the ITG had also to help itself - "Poland believes in Iraq's future, and now you must believe in yourselves." Belka had agreed with PM Ja'afari on an Action Plan for bilateral relations across the board, including political, economic, cultural and scientific issues. He had also initialed two bilateral MOU's, one on non-proliferation and export control cooperation and one on resolution of the dispute over the destruction of cultural treasures in Babylon.

16. (C) Both Switalski and Plominski reiterated Belka's statement in Baghdad that the Polish stabilization mission in Iraq would end in January 2006. The ISF was ready to take over operations in MND-CS and some other sectors, and the Polish contingent was already beginning to hand over some security and patrolling tasks to ISF units and re-focus its own efforts on training. However, both PM Ja'afari and the Kuwaiti PM (whom Belka had seen in Kuwait on July 25) had stressed that MNF-I should not draw down or withdraw quickly, as the political process remained fragile and could not yet survive without their support. It was therefore necessary for Poland and other Coalition partners to maintain a presence in Iraq. Switalski asked point blank how Amb Jones and Lt Gen Smith would advise the GOP to respond to media and public pressure for troop reductions. Smith replied that the Poles should respond "just the way Gen Casey does" (i.e. referring to goals and conditions on the ground, but NOT to timetables or dates certain). Jones added that the best approach was to present troop reductions as the goal, but to link such reductions to improved conditions on the ground, and not to make any mention of timetables or dates certain. Smith added that Polish and U.S. plans for eventual disengagement are identical, but that the U.S. NEVER gives firm dates.

17. (C) Americas Director Szlajfer commented that a political process in Poland was also well underway and would last 2-3 months, through the parliamentary elections and the subsequent presidential elections on October 9, until a new government was formed in late October. So far, the question of Polish engagement in Iraq beyond January 2006 had not been a factor in the electoral campaign, and it would be good to keep it that way. Although the current government was deferring the final decisions to the next government, all options regarding Iraq were under consideration within the GOP, and also within opposition circles. Szlajfer also thought that the U.S. delegation would not be disappointed by its meeting that evening with opposition leaders (to be reported septel).

18. (C) Deputy CHOD Lt Gen Cieniuch then described in brief the General Staff's planning for the Polish 6th rotation, which would begin in January 2006. He confirmed that MND-CS was transferring patrol and security responsibilities for parts of its sector to ISF, and that training activities had already begun. The General Staff was indeed preparing plans for all contingencies, however, it was impossible for the military to plan properly without full political approval. The absence of political approval was becoming a more and more critical problem for the General Staff, in terms of both preparing its own national deployment and, particularly, coordinating participation by other troop contributing nations (TCNs). An eventual force generation (ForceGen) conference in November would be too late to start discussing specific troop contributions, so the General Staff was hoping sooner to send out two mobile staff teams, each led by a

general officer, to consult with their counterparts in MND-CS TCN capitals. In this way, TCNs would at least be prepared for the various contingencies by the time of the ForceGen conference.

PM BELKA ON POLITICAL PROCESS, PLANS FOR WITHDRAWAL

9. (C) The Jones delegation met later July 28 with PM Belka. In response to Jones' and Smith's briefing on U.S. policy, Belka provided his own readout of the July 25-27 visit to the region, including his consultations with the Turkish government in Ankara. He had stressed to Iraqi PM Ja'afari that this was "not just a visit to Polish troops, but a real bilateral consultation between Heads of Government." In addition to the details provided previously by Plominski at MFA, Belka noted the creation of a bilateral "Joint Economic Commission", although he did not elaborate. He shared his impressions of the Iraqi leadership, expressing concern that Iraqi President Talabani was too preoccupied with the problem of Kurdistan. He said that Parliamentary Speaker Al Kassani, a Sunni, had told him that the elections should go forward in December, even/when if the constitutional referendum failed (NB: such an election would be for a new transitional government, again charged with writing a constitution and submitting it to another national referendum), and had assured him that the Sunnis would participate fully in the political process.

10. (C) Belka also described his visit to Arbil, where the Kurdish regional authorities had received him as if it were a "state visit" to a sovereign country. There had been a large media presence, and the Kurdish authorities had noted publicly that this was "the first ever visit of a Head of Government to Kurdistan." Belka had been very careful in his reply, making certain to refer always to "the region of Kurdistan." En route back to Poland, Belka had stopped off for several hours to consult with the Turkish government, in order to make certain his visit to Arbil would not arouse Turkish sensitivities. Without going into detail, Belka said that the Turks focused on only two issues, Polish support for Turkish EU accession (which Belka reaffirmed) and their concern over the implications of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq and resultant Kurdish assertiveness.

11. (C) Turning to Polish military engagement in the region, Belka led by noting that there was "much excitement" within the military over Poland's upcoming lead role in Afghanistan in the second half of 2007. Lt Gen Smith noted that the U.S. appreciated Poland's commitment to Afghanistan, but added that there were still unresolved issues regarding the planned merger of the OEF and ISAF missions. Belka then stated frankly that in Iraq it was time to transfer to ISF responsibility for the three provinces under MND-CS command. The GOP was "determined to complete the stabilization mission" in Iraq in January 2006. Thereafter, there was a possible Polish training role based around the Iraqi military academy at Al Kut. General Casey had told him during his visit to Baghdad that a transfer of responsibility to ISF was possible not only in the MND-CS sector, but also in the MND-SE sector commanded by the UK, as well as in certain parts of northern Iraq. Amb Jones said that the GOP's basic goal of disengagement, transfer to ISF and continued training fit perfectly with U.S. goals. However, Jones stressed, it was crucial that any such planning be contingent on the "conditions on the ground" and not/not linked to timetables or dates certain. (Both Belka and his Chief of Staff, Slawomir Cytrycki, were visibly uncomfortable as Jones delivered this message, although neither chose to respond directly.) In the end, Belka did not commit to any change in the current policy of "out by January", deferring the issue entirely to the next government that would take over after the Polish elections.

DEFMIN ON END OF MISSION

12. (C) On the morning of July 29, the Jones delegation met with DefMin Szmajdzinski, who was joined by Lt Gen Cieniuch as well as members of his staff. Following the U.S. briefing, Szmajdzinski expressed his gratitude for the continuing high level of bilateral cooperation. The common U.S.-Polish problem was how to make sure that MNF-I reached a successful conclusion, rather than simply staying too long and dissolving into nothing. MND-CS had begun with 25 TCNs and some 8500 troops. It had gone through four successful rotations over two years and acquitted itself well. Now, however, this effort was at risk of fading away. The Norwegians, Dutch and Portuguese had made clear from the beginning that their participation in Iraq would last only 6-9 months. Others such as Spain had since abandoned the mission for political reasons. Now there were only 14 TCNs remaining in MND-CS, with some 4000 troops on the ground. Ukraine had declared its intention to withdraw at the end of 2005, and in two weeks Bulgaria might well make the same decision. Poland had made its own public declaration that the 5th rotation, ending in January 2006, was the last of the stabilization mission (i.e. Polish troops participating

directly in security operations). The goal now was to "train, train, train", so that the ISF would be prepared to take over the MND-CS sector at the end of 2005. Then MND-CS could be closed down and declared successful.

113. (C) Szmajdzinski acknowledged the call for continued help in 2006, and stated "If there is indeed still a political need, then we have a limited military capability to meet it."

Poland could take the lead in a much smaller multinational successor to MND-CS, whose mission would be entirely focused on training. Some 200-300 Polish troops could provide command/control and logistics and form the core of this training task force. With troops from some of the remaining TCNs, this task force would establish a training base at Al Kut. Szmajdzinski claimed that he had discussed this plan with SecDef Rumsfeld and Deputy NSA Crouch in Washington, and with senior officials at CentCom in Tampa, as well as with the Iraqi DefMin in Baghdad.

114. (C) Szmajdzinski acknowledged that the current government would, of course, not be taking any decisions on Iraq, as that would be the prerogative of the next government. To allow the issue of Iraq deployment into the public discussion during the electoral campaign would be a great mistake, and could lead to a repeat in Poland of "the Spanish Model." However, the 2006 GOP budget did provide enough funds for the limited Polish mission he had described, and the excellent operational cooperation between MND-CS and the Coalition leadership would facilitate the transition. Sufficient logistical infrastructure and equipment was available to support the training mission, as well.

115. (C) Amb. Jones told Szmajdzinski that it was dangerous to set arbitrary deadlines for withdrawal without taking into account the actual conditions on the ground in Iraq. The U.S. expected an upturn in violence as the calendar for the political process advanced. He stressed that it was crucial to leave all options open to the incoming Polish government, so that they had maximum flexibility to react to events in Iraq. Smith echoed this theme, reiterating that Polish and U.S. goals were the same, but urging the GOP to remain flexible. In particular, the 8th Iraqi Division had not yet been tested in action, and there was no way to tell how they would fare on their first operational missions without a Coalition lead. Lt Gen Smith added that the U.S. in fact planned to deploy an additional brigade to Iraq 45 days before the election process began there, and keep it there 45 days after. Then, if/when the situation allowed, U.S. forces would begin a staged drawdown. Smith also pointed out that Poland was playing a very important leadership role in MND-CS, at a level matched only by the U.S. and the UK. Without the Polish presence, either the U.S. or the UK would have to fill the gap. (COMMENT: Szmajdzinski appeared very uncomfortable during Jones and Smith's remarks. END COMMENT.)

DCHOD VISION MORE FORWARD LEANING

116. (C) Lt Gen Cieniuch then offered a more detailed picture (though without any troop numbers) of how a multinational training force might look:

- A robust Coalition Training Center would be set up in Al Kut, to supplement CentCom's current training plan.
- In addition to the existing training program for platoon leaders, this center would train entire platoons ("the basic operational unit in Iraq") together with a two-week specialized course, with a goal of running every platoon in the Iraqi Army through this course.
- Poland would provide the requisite command/control element, based at Al Kut, as well as its own training element.
- Poland would also provide transport and logistics for all TCN contributions to the training force.
- Polish forces would provide two mobile combat teams of 60-80 troops for rapid response.
- The currently deployed Polish Mi24 helicopters would remain to provide transport for the combat teams.
- Force protection would be required for the training base, for logistics and supply convoys and for the helicopter base.
- This would involve a total multinational force of some 2000 (though Cieniuch declined to specify a number for Polish troops), which would be responsible for not only the training base, but also overall security in the MND-CS sector.

(COMMENT: Szmajdzinski again looked very uncomfortable during Cieniuch's presentation, suggesting a divergence of views between the General Staff and MOD leadership with regard to the Iraq mission. END COMMENT.)

117. (C) In a one-on-one pull-aside with Lt Gen Smith after

the meeting, Cieniuch stated that the General Staff was in fact prepared to field a multinational training force nearly as large as the current 4000-strong MND-CS, and with virtually the same capabilities. He affirmed that the Polish ,06 military budget could support at least 1,000 Polish troops in Iraq, compared to the current Polish force of about 1400. (N.B. Cieniuch has in the past suggested to us that a Polish contingent in 2006 might number some 600 troops. During his discussions with Jones and Smith, however, he spoke only of total Coalition forces in the MND-CS sector, not of specific numbers of Polish troops.)

NEED TO KEEP UP U.S. PRESSURE

18. (S) COMMENT. The current political leadership is clearly not willing to stray from the public line of "out by January" that Szmajdzinski, and more recently Belka and President Kwasniewski, have been stating regularly. Szmajdzinski seems to have convinced himself that the Iraq deployment is so unpopular that the future of his party (SLD, the Democratic Left Alliance) is at risk if he does not completely neutralize the issue. In his mind, he has done this by more and more strictly proscribing the possibilities for continued Polish deployments in Iraq. The irony is that the public at large, and even the media, were not protesting in the streets or speaking out against Iraq engagement prior to Szmajdzinski's "neutralization" campaign. Certainly, opinion polls have consistently shown public support for the Polish deployment as low as 20 percent, but these opinions come out only if asked. No one is campaigning against Iraq, including the opposition parties expected to form the next government coalition. (See septel.) Not only Gen Cieniuch, but also senior MOD officials, are frustrated with Szmajdzinski's obsession with public opinion on Iraq. A week before the Jones' visit, Acting MOD U/S Karkoszka (ref C) told Charge that he and Cieniuch had spent weeks convincing Szmajdzinski to even allow planning for the minimal training deployment that Szmajdzinski described to Jones and Smith (and reportedly during his visits to Tampa and Washington the previous week). Szmajdzinski and other MOD officials claimed that the Jones visit was the first time, since they began hinting at a drawdown or withdrawal in the fall of 2004, that any senior U.S. official has balked at the GOP's plan.

19. (S) In any event, it is clear both from their words and their apparent discomfort during the Jones visit that the current government leaders will not take any affirmative decision about future Iraq deployments. Not only have they deferred the matter to the next government, but Szmajdzinski has, either intentionally or merely as a side effect, severely complicated the task of the incoming government in meeting the operational challenges dictated by the situation in Iraq. We will therefore have to maintain an ongoing dialogue with Polish military leaders regarding their operational plans, while preparing to engage immediately and at a very high level with the incoming government after the September elections here. END COMMENT.
Piascik